

**Press Release**  
**March 13, 2004**  
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**Robert B. Charles, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State  
announced statement before departing Bolivia**

Robert B. Charles, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau for International Narcotics & Law Enforcement Affairs, said that Bolivia has made progress in the fight against drug trafficking and ratified its commitment to continue this effort. The statement by the Assistant Secretary of State, during a two-day official visit to Bolivia, was made at the Chimore airport, before leaving for Bogota, Colombia, to continue his official tour.

“Now that I have been able to see the thousands of hectares cultivated with pineapple, palm heart and banana and as I saw the great and positive progress of alternative development, I am convinced that here lies the best example of development in Bolivia. I also believe, with great conviction, that a pause in the eradication of coca would cause a serious damage and be a backward step in all that has been accomplished so far to improve the life quality and the income of Chapare families.

The government of President Mesa has expressed a clear commitment to continue long-standing state policies to combat drug trafficking, under the framework of Bolivian counternarcotics laws. The United States will support the initiatives of President Mesa’s government aimed at increasing interdiction against drug trafficking, eradicating illegal coca crops in Bolivia and strengthening programs for economic alternatives for farmers who leave the coca and cocaine circuit. The government has manifested its intention to continue the progress it has achieved so far, while expanding community participation.

Also, we have shared with President Mesa and his team our concern regarding the indicators showing an increase in drug consumption, which threatens the health of Bolivian children and youths. Drugs harm the entire society and, as we said to the President, the United States will help, as best it can to undertake programs to prevent drug consumption, since this is a top priority in every society.

As I conclude my visit to Bolivia today, I am able to see in Chimore the effort and sacrifice of the officers and personnel of counternarcotics police and the Armed Forces, who are willing on a daily basis to combat illegal drug trafficking, even to the point of risking their own lives. Despite the constant threats of violence they encountered last year, this group of courageous Bolivians has reaffirmed its commitment to secure a future free of drugs and free of the crime caused by them.”